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ABSTRACT

The concept of wellness is defined and the importance of establishing a healthy lifestyle is discussed. A description is given of the Rochester Institute of Technology Wellness Program, which is typical of the many current programs covering varying aspects of wellness. These programs are offered by private agencies, educational institutions, and communities. A description is also provided of wellness programs in the workplace. A bibliography is included. (JD)

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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

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Wellness: A Balanced Lifestyle

Wellness has become a popular concept in recent years. This Digest will address three major areas:

1. What is wellness?
2. Why is wellness important?
3. What types of programs are currently in existence?

What Is Wellness?

Wellness can be described as a lifestyle designed to reach one's highest potential for wholeness and well-being. Wellness has to do with a zest for living, feeling good about oneself, having goals and purposes for life, and being spiritually alive. This concept is far more than freedom from symptoms of illness and basic health maintenance, but reaches beyond to an optimal level of well-being.

Wellness has been defined in a number of ways including:

"An integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable, within the environment where he/she is functioning" (Dunn, 1959).

"A way of life, a lifestyle you design in order to achieve your highest potential for well-being" (Travis, 1977).

"A lifestyle for approaching an individual's best potential for well-being" (Ardell, 1979).

The wellness lifestyle is a coordinated and integrated pattern of living, focusing on the following areas: emotional, intellectual, environmental, physical, spiritual, and social. These areas are explained more fully below.

Emotional development emphasizes an awareness and acceptance of one's feelings. Emotional wellness includes the degree to which one feels positive and enthusiastic about one's self

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and life. The emotionally well person maintains satisfying relationships with others.

Environmental development refers to the extent your immediate surroundings either facilitate or inhibit your efforts to pursue a health-enhancing lifestyle.

Intellectual development encourages creative, stimulating mental activities. An intellectually well person uses the resources available to expand her/his knowledge in improved skills along with expanding potential for sharing with others.

Physical development stresses physical fitness, encourages knowledge about food and nutrition, and discourages the use of tobacco, drugs, and excessive alcohol consumption. It encourages consumption and activities which contribute to high level wellness including medical self-care and the appropriate use of the medical system.

Social development encourages contributing to one's human and physical environment to the common welfare of one's community. It emphasizes the interdependence with others and nature and includes the pursuit of harmony in one's family.

Spiritual development involves seeking meaning and purpose in human existence. It includes the development of a deep appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.

Overall, the principle goals of wellness are a) to encourage individuals to assume more responsibility for their health; b) to view health as more than nonillness; c) to realize the interdependence of the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, environmental and spiritual areas of an individual's well-being; and d) to emphasize the uniqueness of each individual in planning for personal wellness (Ardell & Tager, 1981).

Why Is Wellness Important?

The ability to live a vigorous full life, is directly related to one's lifestyle. Statistics show that an increasing number of Americans now die from "diseases of choice" because these diseases can be directly related to individual lifestyle choices.

At the turn of the century, infectious diseases, such as pneumonia, diphtheria, influenza, tuberculosis, cholera, and small pox, were the leading causes of illness and death. In recent years, Americans are dying from chronic, debilitating diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and cancer. "Of the ten leading causes of death in the United States, at least seven could be substantially reduced if people improved just five aspects of their lifestyle: diet, smoking, exercise, alcohol and blood pressure control" (Ardell & Tager, 1981).

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The increased cost of health care is also a major concern for many individuals and companies. Health care cost is on the rise and it is estimated that current health insurance premiums have increased by 20% (Kotz & Fielding, 1980).

"Total medical care expenditures in the United States in 1960 were $26.9 billion (5.3 percent of the Gross National Product). By 1970, those costs had risen to $75 billion (7.6 percent of the GNP), and, by 1980, the costs were recorded at $243.4 billion (9.4 percent of the GNP), with business paying over half of the national health care bill. If permitted to continue, health care costs or, more accurately, the costs of illness and rehabilitative care, are expected to top $462.2 billion in 1985 (9.9 percent of the GNP), reflecting yearly per capita expenditures of $1,946.50 (McGinnis & Duval, 1982). Premature employee death costs in American industry are $19.4 billion annually--more than the combined 1976 profits of Fortune's top five corporations (Golaszewski, 1981). Also, Fielding (1979) points out that industry pays twice for the cost of health care: First through insurance premiums and then through the economic burden for employee absenteeism, turnover, retraining, and premature death. A wellness lifestyle can have a direct effect on the morbidity and mortality patterns of Americans. Saving lives and money through positive health practices should be the goal of all Americans.

What Types Of Programs Are Currently In Existence?

Many programs covering varying aspects of wellness are currently in existence. These programs are offered by numerous agencies and organizations including corporations, hospitals, YMCA/YWCA, colleges and universities, community recreation centers and school systems to name a few. As you will see in the following two program examples, programs vary in content and scope, but they are all focused on promoting a wellness lifestyle.

Rochester Institute of Technology Wellness Program

This program is directed toward the 16,000 students at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). This community is unique in that more than 1,000 of these students are hearing impaired and enrolled through the National Technology Institute for the Deaf (NTID). The program developers believed that "College students are in a state of transition, and they are in the process of making personal lifestyle choices" (Chandler, 1985). This program's coordinated approach, involves a planning committee made up of representatives from various departments under the Division of Student Affairs including the Health Service, Counseling Center, Resident Life, Complementary Education, Student Activities, and the NTID Student Life and Psychological Services.

The emphasis of the program was to promote wellness campuswide by a) creating an environment supporting a wellness-oriented culture and promoting positive lifestyles and attitudes, b) bringing about positive changes in student behaviors

and attitudes with emphasis on the development of the whole person, and c) coordinating campuswide programming focusing on an integrated wellness approach.

A slide show, developed by students and family on the RIT campus is used to promote an understanding of wellness and emphasizes taking responsibility for one's own health; preventing illness; choosing positive lifestyle habits; developing the whole person--body, mind and spirit; and, having a positive attitude toward oneself and others. Students follow up by taking a confidential health questionnaire (Medical Datamation) that evaluates individual and family medical history; exercise, food, drug and safety habits; stress level; prevention skills; and, health attitudes/values. Follow-up counseling and wellness programs scheduled throughout the year are to assist students in modifying and maintaining positive health practices. The major emphasis of this program is to get students to take responsibility for their own health behavior and use campus resources. Some initial positive changes on the RIT campus include nutritious snack machines, more nonsmoking areas, wellness floors in residence halls, and a wellness club. Campuses nationwide are beginning to include wellness programming as a part of their programs and services.

Wellness In The Workplace

Wellness In The Workplace is a regional consortium of individuals and community-based organizations that was established in 1980 by the Division of Continuing Studies, at the State University of New York (SUNY)-Albany. The program is designed to deliver quality health promotion/risk reduction programs to employer-employee populations in northeastern New York State. Companies may hire their own personnel to develop a program, utilize existing community resources, or contract with a private or public sector agency to provide a specialized or packaged program. Smaller companies may have difficulty establishing a program due to lack of capital to hire their own staff, lack of facilities, unfamiliarity with community health education resources, and inability to use existing resources in a coordinated way to develop a program that will meet their needs (Basch et al, 1985).

The impetus for Wellness In The Workplace grew from the fact that many organizations and companies in that area were interested in and committed to worksite health promotion programs, but lacked the resources and/or financial investment to initiate them.

"At present, the program staff, in cooperation with consortium members, delivers the following specialized services:

1. Provides current information to employers and employees about health promotion/risk reduction programs through personal contacts at the worksite, periodic mass mailings to employer-employee groups, frequent media releases, and presentations for a variety of audiences (such as business

groups, joint labor-management committees, personnel directors, universities and colleges, and civic organizations).

2. Conducts confidential employee risk assessment (using the Centers for Disease Control Instrument-Form B) and provides interpretation of individual health risk appraisal results.

3. Computes corporate analysis of the total employee population at each worksite based on aggregate data.

4. Administers employee interest surveys to determine employees' perceptions about their own personal health and their readiness to participate in alternative health promotion programs.

5. Assists Wellness In The Workplace clients in designing coordinated health promotion programs by drawing upon the expertise of diverse regional providers.

6. Conducts evaluation of the effectiveness of health promotion programs based on self-reported behavioral changes and limited physiological measures.

7. Coordinates adult education programs for the general population through the Division of Continuing Studies at SUNY-Albany" (Basch et al, 1985).

Benefits that may be realized from the consortium model include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. identification of gaps and duplication of health promotion services;

2. development of new programs designed to meet needs of previously underserved populations;

3. efficient and coordinated utilization of existing resources; and

4. increased accessibility of health promotion activities to businesses of all sizes.

The consortium model represents an innovative alternative to delivery of coordinated health promotion programs for workplace populations (Basch et al, 1985).

In recent years, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of wellness programs in the workplace, not only from the business community, but from employees themselves. The bottom line for both employees and employers is to reduce health care costs, and maintain healthy, productive lives.

What Does The Future Hold For Wellness?

The future of the wellness movement looks very positive. In the years ahead, as the major focus of our health care system moves from treating disease and sickness to maintaining healthy lifestyles, wellness will become the framework for providing for full vital lives.

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In the following references, the journal articles have been abstracted and are in the ERIC data base. These articles are available at most research libraries. For information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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